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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO JUNE 4 POTUS SPEECH

¶1. SUMMARY: Government-owned press in Djibouti devoted considerable media attention to the June 4 POTUS speech in Cairo before, during, and after the event. Prior to the speech, French-language newspapers carried a lengthy opinion piece reflecting the Government of Djibouti's expectations that the speech would be an attempt to "change the conversation with the Muslim world." After the speech, the press described the speech as "historic" and "moving," but cast it as an attempt to repair relationships damaged by "American anger" at the Muslim world after the September 11 attacks. Finally, state-run media featured a full-page article analyzing the themes addressed in the speech, highlighting that while "one sole speech can't erase years of suspicion," the President wanted to "to learn, to listen, to treat [the Muslim world] with respect and find common ground." END SUMMARY.

PRE-SPEECH (JUNE 1-3)

¶2. Prior to the speech, the government-owned French-language newspaper, "La Nation," printed an article entitled "Barack Obama to meet the Muslim world." The article was reprinted from the French journal, "Le Monde," without acknowledgement of its provenance. However, by appearing in "La Nation," the GODJ indicated it concurred with the opinions expressed in the article. There were only moderate expectations on policy, particularly regarding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and Iran. It was noted that the address was likely to build on the series of gestures taken by the U.S. administration since January, including the New Year's message to Iran. "La Nation" expected that the President would acknowledge the many important contributions Muslim-Americans had made to U.S. society and address the cultural and political issues dividing the U.S. and the Muslim world.

SPEECH DAY (JUNE 4)

¶3. Government-owned Radio Television Djibouti (RTD) devoted nearly twenty percent of its prime-time Somali-language news service to covering the speech. RTD stated that the speech was an attempt to repair relationships between the U.S. and the Muslim world damaged by "American anger" in the wake of 9/11. RTD reported that the U.S. "is not an enemy of Islam," and that the President called upon Muslims worldwide to reject the extremist ideology preached by the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks and to "embrace" a "true" or "ideal" Islam. RTD editorialized that the speech was an attempt to discuss traditionally taboo subjects and clearly articulate U.S. policy in the region. RTD did not touch upon all six points

addressed in the POTUS speech, but did mention that it addressed women's rights, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and U.S. intentions in Iraq and Afghanistan. RTD noted the call for Israel to stop colonization efforts and the President's promise to withdraw troops from Iraq by August, 2010.

POST-SPEECH (JUNE 5-8)

¶4. On June 8, "La Nation" summarized all six points of the POTUS speech in-depth, with final editorial comments relating to the previous administration. "La Nation" highlighted the statement that Islam was part of the solution to extremists like Al-Qaida, and applauded the call for Israel to cease construction of settlements and the "intolerable" situation faced by Palestinians. It also highlighted the demand that Hamas cease violence and recognize Israel's right to exist. The article summarized the reasons behind the strained U.S.-Iran relationship and articulated that the President desired to avoid an "arms race" in the Middle East. It noted that Iran should live up to its obligations under the non-proliferation treaty and cease to define itself "in opposition" to the United States.

¶5. While "La Nation" used bold sub-head size to draw attention to the points about extremism, nuclear arms, Iran, and the Israel-Palestinian conflict, it did not give the same

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treatment to democracy, religious liberty, and women's rights. These portions of the speech were summarized as well, but not highlighted in bold text as the preceding topics had been. The paper noted that the President urged both the Middle East and Western countries to respect the rights of religious minorities. "La Nation" pointed out that the President called upon Western countries not to "hide hostility towards certain religions under the guise of 'liberalism' and infringe upon their rights to practice their religion."

¶6. The final section of the article was editorial in tone and entitled "leaving the Bush-era and restoring the image of the U.S." "La Nation" stated that the "war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Abou Ghraib scandal... the Guantanamo Bay prisoners and Bush's resolutely pro-Israeli" stance tarnished the U.S. image abroad, particularly in the Arab and Muslim worlds. "La Nation" indicated that the polio eradication program and development initiatives may help repair the damage done. "La Nation" noted the skillful use of social media employed by the current administration to ensure the message reached the widest possible audience, including youth.

¶7. COMMENT. Djibouti is a moderate, majority-Muslim country that hosts French, U.S., Japanese, and international coalition military forces. All domestic press is owned by the GODJ, and the press environment is tightly controlled. The GODJ is religiously quite moderate and the speech was very well received by GODJ officials. In subsequent meetings, those same officials raised issues addressed in the President's speech, showing that the message had been received and resonated within the ruling elite. Some imams also incorporated the speech into their Friday sermons, and the buzz created by this address amongst the general population is quite large. However, a degree of skepticism remains, as some question whether the USG will be able to deliver on the promises made in Cairo. Many have taken a "wait and see" approach to gauge whether the USG will follow words with action. END COMMENT.

SWAN